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KGB Uses Allies To Swell Ranks Of Spy Network

The Soviet KGB has found a convenient, economical way to expand its espionage resources: it uses its eastern European allies to do an increasing amount of the dirty work.

Last May, I broke the story of the KGB's suspected complicity in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. Since then, the evidence has been mounting.

In fact, western intelligence sources now say that the new Soviet dictator, Yuri V. Andropov, was at least a knowing accomplice in the pope's shooting, if he didn't actually orchestrate the whole thing when he headed the KGB.

The nearly successful "hit" certainly fit the pattern of the KGB's murder-by-surrogate technique. The confessed gunman, Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca, was working with the Bulgarian secret police, Durzhavna Sigurnost (DS). He met with assassination planners in Bulgaria, and obtained his gun, his false identity documents and a large amount of cash there. Three Bulgarians have been arrested as accomplices.

The Bulgarian secret police have always been the closest and most willing of the Soviets' surrogate goon

squadra. As far back as 1978, Bulgarian killers were fingered as the ones responsible for the murder of a defector in London with a poison pellet fired from an umbrella.

And it was definitely Andropov who reorganized the KGB and decided to make greater use of satellite manpower. So the attempt on the pope can be traced indirectly, if not directly, to him. Here's how Andropov's worldwide network operates:

Killings, known as "mokrie dela" or "wet affairs," because of the blood that is shed, are planned in Department V of the KGB in Moscow. If the Soviets want to put a little distance between themselves and an assassination, it will be turned over to Department 11 of the KGB's foreign division, once known as the "Advisers Department."

More than 100 KGB supervisors are stationed at the espionage headquarters of the various satellite governments, in Sofia, Prague, East Berlin, Budapest, Warsaw, Bucharest and Havana. These KGB "uncles" approve or veto the satellites' spy operations. They monitor incoming intelligence reports and pass along the most important to Moscow.

In some cases—at the Dirección General de Inteligencia in Havana, for example—the Soviet supervisors even draw up the budgets for covert operations.

Perhaps the biggest advantage is in the number of agents available to

work for the Kremlin by adding surrogate spies to the Soviets' undercover operatives. A top-secret intelligence review notes that there are more than 90 different official and quasi-official missions from communist countries in the United States alone. Of the 2,000 or so personnel attached to these missions, there are at least "544 known or suspected intelligence officers," the review states.

But the number is much higher, intelligence sources told my associate Dale Van Atta. The CIA reckons that roughly 40 percent of communist-mission personnel are intelligence agents. That means 800 foreign agents the FBI has to keep track of, and it can take as many as eight G-men to keep a single agent under proper surveillance.

The KGB has its favorites among satellite espionage personnel. The Czechs are at or near the top of the list, "because of their abject subservience," as one intelligence report noted. The East Germans "are of increasing importance from year to year," largely because of their ability to infiltrate West German agencies and gain access to U.S. secrets.

And the Bulgarians are valued by the KGB "because they like the Russians and support them enthusiastically." It remains to be seen whether this enthusiasm will survive Andropov's letting the Bulgarians take the rap for the attempted assassination of the pope.